

VZCZCXRO3846
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #2229/01 3371231
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 021231Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0487
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002229

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2018

TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: HALO TRUST CONTINUES TO CLEAR THE LAND

REF: TBILISI 1592

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. The HALO Trust, a British Demining/Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) clearance NGO conducted an emergency ERW survey of Georgia, and is engaged in Battle Area Clearance (BAC) training, clearance operations, and mine/Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) risk education projects in Abkhazia and the undisputed areas of Georgia. Department of State provided funding of 4.4 million dollars for these on-going activities. Other donors included the European Union and the Governments of the United Kingdom and Germany, who contributed to the clearance programs, and UNICEF, who contributed to risk education. HALO is progressing well, and has cleared a total of 1,040 items of cluster munitions, UXO and abandoned ordnance (AO) in the area between Gori and South Ossetia to date, and over 15,000 mines, UXO and AO in the separatist region of Abkhazia. While HALO expects to complete minefield clearance in Abkhazia, excluding the Upper Kodori region, by the end of 2009, HALO estimates that at least another six months of clearance will be required to remove all known ERW from the Gori-Tskhinvali corridor, and another two years of clearance will be required in the Upper Kodori. Furthermore, clearance operations in the separatist region of South Ossetia have yet to begin. HALO has also confirmed, that cluster munitions were used in civilian areas by both Georgia and Russia during the August conflict. End Summary.

OPERATIONS STATISTICS

12. (U) Two BAC training courses were completed this year and produced a total of 156 new staff. The majority of the staff are from affected villages within the former buffer zone. HALO is currently deploying 14 sub-surface clearance teams, 12 surface clearance teams, and 2 survey/EOD teams. Each team consists of five searchers and one team leader. 24 of these teams are locally recruited and four are from Gali, in the ethnic-Georgian majority area of the separatist region of Abkhazia. In total, there are 192 operations staff based in Gori and 18 support staff.

13. (C) As of November 22, a total of 491 cluster munitions, 462 AO and 87 unexploded ordnance had been cleared from villages in the Gori-Tskhinvali corridor since early September. This clearance, primarily of agricultural land, has allowed residents to harvest their crops safely. Despite denials by the Government of Russia that cluster bombs had been used at all and earlier denials by the government of Georgia that they had used cluster munitions in civilian areas, HALO Trust did confirm that cluster munitions were found from both countries in ethnic Georgian villages in the Gori-Tskhinvali corridor. Although the true targets of the bombs cannot be established, they are all located in the primary battleground between Tskhinvali and Gori. Russian cluster munitions were discovered in Akhaldaba, Dzlevijvari, Karaleti, Karbi, Kvemo khviti, Kvemo Nikozi, Ruisi, Variani, and Variani Meurneoba. Georgian cluster munitions were found in Brotsleti, Ditsi, Ergneti, Kvemo nikozi, Meghvreskisi,

Pkhvenisi, Shindisi, Tirdnisi and Variani. (Note: In responding to similar allegations by Amnesty International, the Georgian government explained that it directed cluster munitions against military targets; Amnesty found that legitimate military targets were within the general vicinity of the cluster munitions, but still questioned the justifiability of their use. According to Amnesty, the Russian government did not respond to queries on the topic. Russian government did not respond to queries on the topic. End Note.)

14. (U) HALO also completed an emergency ERW survey, which was published on October 31, 2008. Included was a survey of the Gori-Tskhinvali corridor, minefields in Abkhazia from the 1992 conflict, minefields and UXO in the Upper Kodori, and Soviet legacy minefields. In the Gori-Tskhinvali zone, HALO identified 16 villages, of 131 visited, affected by cluster munitions. They also found other UXO, primarily S-8 air-to-surface rockets, as well as abandoned ordnance. Specific details and clearance required for each village visited can be found in the survey. General contamination maps have been produced for 15 of the 16 villages contaminated by cluster munitions, and these have been included in the survey report. The one exception is Ergneti on the South Ossetian border, where Georgian police restricted access until an Ossetian checkpoint was recently moved back. These maps show the approximate extent of cluster contamination in each location, and will be further refined by survey teams revisiting the tasks and during the course of surface clearance. An initial assessment of South Ossetia will be completed as soon as HALO is able to gain full access to the region.

TBILISI 00002229 002 OF 002

15. (U) In Abkhazia, HALO has cleared 280 minefields from the 1992-1993 war, with 22 remaining, since they began work there in 1997. This amounts to over 15,000 mines, UXO and AO having been destroyed. HALO expects to complete minefield clearance in Abkhazia by the end of 2009. These numbers exclude the Upper Kodori, to which they gained access only in August. 13,671 items of abandoned ordnance in Upper Kodori have been destroyed since September. Almost all the immediate threat posed by UXO and AO has been removed from around villages and housing. Most of the UXO were cleared from damaged ammunition depots in the center of Azhara village using an armored Volvo loader to clear rubble for inspection. The minefield survey is underway, with thirty minefields in Upper Kodori already surveyed. HALO estimates that the area will require an additional two years of clearance.

16. (C) A HALO Trust officer reported that that on a recent trip to the Upper Kodori region, he was extremely troubled to see recently built Georgian administrative buildings, banks and schools that had been vandalized by Abkhaz militia. However, on a happier note, he was heartened to hear that Abkhaz HALO demining teams were helping the remaining ethnic Georgians bring in their maize and potato crops after completing their clearance activities for the day. The teams in the Upper Kodori lodge with ethnic Georgian families, paying them rent, which is greatly appreciated by the communities. The landlady that the officer stayed with was so grateful for the overall help and general security provided by the deminers that she was in tears thanking him. This underscores that the project is not only a critical humanitarian operation, but also a key peacebuilding initiative.

17. (U) In addition to mines and UXO from the 1992-1993 war and the 2008 conflict, Soviet legacy minefields continue to pose a threat to the population. HALO identified three of these as high priority, Red Bridge border minefield, Mtskheta former military base, and Alinja former military base, and one, Akhalkalaki former military base, as medium priority.

RISK EDUCATION

18. (U) HALO has provided risk education training to schoolchildren, IDPs, NGOs, international organizations, and government staff. Approximately 5,500 people received leaflets and on-the-spot advice during the emergency phase at the end of August and early September. 44,627 schoolchildren in Shida Kartli region have had risk-awareness lessons, 1,159 adults in affected villages attended risk-awareness evening classes, and 108 residents of the Gori IDP camp have attended ERW awareness sessions. In addition to those directly affected by the threat, HALO also provided ERW awareness training to 251 NGO staff working in the affected area, 300 EU monitors, and 46 OSCE military monitors and mission staff. In addition, 22 Border Police staff received training, and 90 police in Gori District will receive training in December.

TEFFT